

TÍN NIỆM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TIẾNG ANH VỀ ĐƯỜNG HƯỚNG GIẢNG DẠY KỸ NĂNG VIẾT CHO SINH VIÊN: NGHIÊN CỨU ĐỊNH TÍNH QUY MÔ NHỎ TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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Mặc dù đã có nhiều nghiên cứu về mối liên hệ giữa tín niệm và thực tiễn giảng dạy kỹ năng viết bằng ngôn ngữ thứ hai, tuy nhiên, nghiên cứu về tín niệm của giáo viên về đường hướng giảng dạy kỹ năng viết và các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến quá trình hình thành tín niệm này, đặc biệt là ở bậc đại học ở Việt Nam, vẫn còn hạn chế. Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu về tín niệm của ba giáo viên tại một trường đại học về các đường hướng giảng dạy kỹ năng viết. Dữ liệu thu thập từ các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu cho thấy sự không nhất quán giữa đường hướng mà giáo viên áp dụng so với đường hướng mong muốn của họ. Tuy có thể kết hợp linh hoạt đường hướng dạy viết theo sản phẩm và tiến trình nhưng họ thường có xu hướng thiên về một trong hai đường hướng này. Nguyên nhân chính xuất phát từ các yếu tố ngoại cảnh như thiếu chương trình đào tạo chuyên môn cho giáo viên, sĩ số lớp đông và sinh viên thiếu động lực học kỹ năng viết tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu này nhấn mạnh việc giáo viên cần có cơ hội được tham gia các khóa đào tạo về phương pháp dạy viết, đặc biệt chú trọng đến đường hướng dạy kỹ năng viết theo thể loại văn bản. Qua đó giáo viên có thể nâng cao sự hiểu biết về ba đường hướng giảng dạy kỹ năng viết và tích hợp cả ba đường hướng này trong quá trình giảng dạy tùy theo từng trường hợp cụ thể.

Từ khóa: Tín niệm của giáo viên, đường hướng giảng dạy kỹ năng viết theo sản phẩm, đường hướng dạy kỹ năng viết theo tiến trình, đường hướng dạy kỹ năng viết dựa vào phân tích thể loại.

Despite extensive research on the relationship between beliefs and practices in various aspects of second language writing instruction, studies focusing on teachers' beliefs regarding teaching approaches to writing and the factors that shape these beliefs, particularly in higher education contexts, are scarce. This study investigated the beliefs of three university teachers regarding their instructional approaches to second language writing via in-depth semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal a discrepancy between the teachers' preferred approaches and those they actually use. Although the teachers could flexibly implement an eclectic approach that combines both product- and process-oriented methods, they tend to prefer a single approach. In addition, the challenges preventing these teachers from implementing their preferred approaches may derive from the external factors, including the lack of professional development, large class

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sizes, and the low student motivation. This study emphasises the importance of providing teachers with opportunities for professional development, particularly courses focused on genre-based approaches. Such training can enhance their understanding and enable them to effectively integrate elements of all three approaches into their teaching practices within specific contexts.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, product-oriented approach, process-oriented approach, genre-based approach.

BELIEFS OF EFL TEACHERS REGARDING TEACHING APPROACHES TO WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS: A SMALL-SCALE QUALITATIVE STUDY AT A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

1. Introduction

The field of second language (L2) writing, which includes research on second and foreign language writing and writing instruction, has increasingly acknowledged the importance of studying teachers' beliefs. This stems from the consensus that understanding teachers' beliefs and practices is essential for effective teacher education (Lee, 2014). Research in this subfield has revealed valuable information about how teachers think, believe, and make decisions regarding L2 writing instructional approaches (Lee, 2014). Overall, the findings of these studies highlight the dissonance between the teachers' beliefs and practices which stems from the impact of various factors such as previous learning experiences, and situated teaching contexts (Lee, 2014). Nevertheless, the subfield that examines teachers' beliefs toward approaches to teaching instructions is limited.

Writing is crucial in various aspects of life. Socially, it plays a vital role in

contemporary society (Graham et al., 2018) as it connects people through various forms of communication, such as social media, emails, and messaging apps. It also enables individuals to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with a wider audience, fostering relationships and communities across geographical boundaries. Academically, it is essential for collecting, processing, transferring, exchanging, and storing information and data in educational contexts (Graham et al., 2018). Despite its importance, writing is often considered the most challenging language skill to acquire due to the need for grammar, vocabulary, logical organisation, idea generation, effective composition, and revision (Hyland, 2003). Traditional ESL/EFL writing teaching often focuses on the product, neglecting the writing process (Kim & Kim, 2005). To address this gap, the process-based approach emphasises planning, drafting, and revising over linguistic knowledge (Badger & White, 2000).

There are several motivations behind this study. First, there is a growing focus in educational research on instructional methods for L2 writing. Despite significant changes in L2 writing pedagogies, including paradigm shifts from a product-oriented to a process- and genre-oriented approach (Nguyen, 2022), teachers' beliefs about these approaches have not been thoroughly explored. Second, although process- and genre-oriented approaches have been promoted globally, they are not widely utilised by Vietnamese EFL writing teachers (Nguyen, 2022). Understanding teachers' beliefs and practices is essential for fostering sustainable change. Third, research on Vietnamese teachers' beliefs regarding instructional approaches to L2 writing is limited, especially at the university level. Previous studies at secondary and post-secondary levels (e.g., Nguyen, 2021; Pham & Truong, 2021) found that teachers held divergent opinions about writing skills and teaching writing, most of them tended to lean towards a form-based orientation in their beliefs, leading to implementing the product-based approach in practice. This small-scale qualitative study aims to fill this gap by investigating the beliefs of three EFL writing teachers in a Vietnamese university. It explores their utilised and preferred approaches to teaching writing, as well as the factors influencing the formation of their beliefs, thus offering practical and theoretical insights for stakeholders in similar contexts. To address this gap, the

following research questions were investigated in this study:

1. What approach(es) to teaching writing among product-, process-, and genre-oriented approaches do Vietnamese EFL university teachers utilise?
2. What approach(es) to teaching writing do Vietnamese EFL university teachers prefer?
3. What factors influence the formation of teachers' beliefs about their preferred approach(es) to teaching writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Concept of teachers' beliefs*

Beliefs have been an interesting topic for research in language teaching and learning. Green (1971) defines belief as a "proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding the belief" (p. 104). Meanwhile, in the field of language teaching, Borg (2006) used the term 'teacher cognition' as a theoretical framework, which refers to a complex combination of knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts held by language teachers regarding their instructional decisions and actions, rather than simply referring to 'teachers' beliefs'. To address this conceptualisation issue, Borg (2015) concluded that belief is a multidimensional concept with numerous interchangeable terms, such as 'cognition', 'perceptions', 'perspective', 'conception', and 'principle'. In this study, the term 'teacher belief' is used as a generic term to refer to "the

unobservable cognitive dimensions of teaching - what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81), combining teaching-related assumptions, standards, feelings, and perceptions. Hence, beliefs constitute a dimension of cognition (Borg, 2006) because they guide teachers’ behaviours and actions.

2.2. A theoretical framework - Factors influencing the formation of teachers’ beliefs

Since the objective of the study is to obtain a deeper understanding of the contributing factors that shape the teachers’ beliefs, a theoretical framework is deemed necessary. Borg (2003) proposes a framework (Figure 1) consisting of four factors (i.e., schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors, and classroom practice) that significantly

influence the formation of teachers’ beliefs. First, schooling refers to teachers’ prior experiences as learners, which play a crucial role in the formulation of their beliefs (Borg, 2003). Second, professional coursework or teacher education is acknowledged as an additional source of belief. Through these opportunities, teachers can expand their pedagogical expertise and cultivate their professional skills, thus impacting or enabling them to reframe their existing beliefs about teaching (Borg, 2003). Third, teachers’ beliefs are impacted by their classroom experiences “unconsciously and/or through conscious reflection” (Borg, 2006, p. 283). Finally, contextual factors, such as the curriculum, school policies, and teaching environment, may influence the associations between teachers’ beliefs and practices.

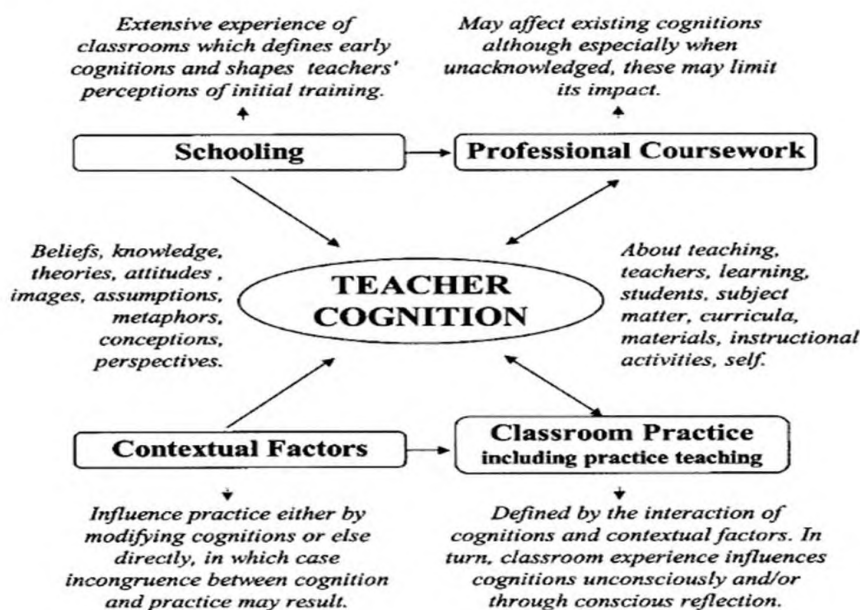


Figure 1. Factors influencing the formation of teachers’ belief

Researchers have endorsed Borg's (2003) framework due to its effectiveness in exploring the developmental process of teachers' beliefs. For instance, Yang and Gao (2013) concurred that teachers construct their beliefs over their entire careers as they continuously develop their knowledge and understanding through teaching experience, student engagement, and professional development courses. In addition, Shakir and Rasool (2021, p. 1013) contended that Borg's model offers "a comprehensive and holistic framework" for teachers' beliefs as it highlights the influences shaping teacher cognition, encompassing not only how teachers' beliefs, teaching practices, and contextual factors interact but also the impact of teachers' educational background and professional development.

In this study, Borg's (2003) framework, including three parameters, namely, professional coursework, contextual factors, and classroom practice was applied to identify the factors that influence the formation of instructors' beliefs, which would then be useful in determining how they affect language teaching and learning. This adaptation is driven by the recognition that the school learning experience identifies early cognitions and shapes teachers' beliefs of initial training (Borg, 2003); however, based on constructivism, the working contexts, social interactions, motivations, and values that influence teachers' instructional practices play a relevant role as well (Alvear et al., 2023).

2.3. Approaches to teaching writing

In addition to gaining an understanding of the concept of teachers' beliefs and the framework underlying their formation, it is necessary to examine the various approaches to teaching writing. Decisions about writing instruction are made within three approaches: product-oriented, process-oriented, and genre-based, reflecting the divergent views of the nature of writing (Hyland, 2003). First, the product-oriented approach to writing instruction views writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, emphasising the correct use of lexis, syntax, and cohesive devices (Badger & White, 2000). In this method, there are four phases of writing instruction: familiarisation, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing (Badger & White, 2000, p.153). The purpose of the familiarisation stage is to make students aware of specific textual characteristics. In the controlled and guided writing sections, students progressively develop their skills with greater autonomy until they are ready for the unrestricted writing phase, during which they apply their writing abilities in authentic tasks such as composing letters, stories, or essays (Badger & White, 2000). Consequently, improvement in writing skills is primarily achieved through the process of imitating the input, which is typically in the form of texts given by the teacher.

Hence, product-oriented approaches consider writing to be primarily concerned

with knowledge of the structure of language and writing development to be primarily the result of the imitation of teacher-provided input in the form of texts. Writing is primarily taught through fostering learners' ability to produce fixed expressions, and reacting to writing entails locating and fixing issues with a student's command of the language system. However, a major criticism of the product-based approach is that it overemphasises linguistic or rhetorical features and disregards purpose, audience, and the composition process. According to Badger and White (2000), this approach mainly focuses on "knowledge about the structure of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of input, in the form of texts provided by the teacher" (p. 154).

In contrast, writing in the process-oriented approach is primarily associated with linguistic skills, such as planning and composing, and places much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as grammar and text structure knowledge. Rather than focusing on textual characteristics, this approach emphasises the writing processes through which authors generate textual ideas (Hyland, 2003). Prewriting, composing, revising, and editing are the four distinct phases (Badger & White, 2000). This approach is "non-linear" or "recursive" because writers can move back and forth between writing stages (Badger & White, 2000, p. 154). In process-oriented approaches, the teacher is predominantly

responsible for facilitating the writing of the students, and providing input or stimuli is regarded as less important

The process-oriented approach relies more on assisting learners in producing ideas by providing meaningful content for writing tasks than on generating grammatically correct prose, thereby facilitating their development as writers. Nonetheless, it offers a "somewhat monolithic view of writing", ignoring "what is being written and who is writing" (Badger & White, 2000, p. 154) and therefore fails to provide an unambiguous viewpoint on the social nature of writing or the role of language and text structure in effective written communication. Students are not given clear instructions on how to construct the various types of texts they are required to write when they are encouraged to create their meanings and discover their text forms. Much criticism has been directed at the reliance on individual expressiveness, primarily because it tends to presume that students possess all of the inner capacities necessary to write well, hence, they do not need to learn other writing skills. Nevertheless, Hyland (2003) asserted that in addition to knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, successful writers must also possess sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

The genre-based approach, however, combines writing instruction with the recognition and reproduction of textual patterns (Hyland, 2007). According to Hyland (2007), genre denotes "abstract,

socially recognised ways of using language” (p. 149). Genre-based writing emphasises that different writing genres may be appropriate for different social circumstances and views writing as a form of language use that is socially accepted (Badger & White, 2000). The teaching-learning cycle of a genre-based approach typically consists of five major stages: setting the context (exploring the purpose and setting of a given genre), modelling (analyse key characteristics of a sample genre text), joint construction (teacher/peer scaffolding), independent construction (independent writing), and comparing (compare genres to identify social purposes) (Hyland, 2007).

To develop students’ ability to write in a particular genre, students should be exposed to as many examples of that genre as feasible. In doing so, students can identify “the specialised configurations of that genre” (Badger & White, 2000, p. 156) and recall previous reading and writing experiences when tasked with creating their own written work in a familiar genre. Nevertheless, the genre approach is criticised for constraining learners’ creative thinking regarding content and for disregarding natural learning processes and learners’ creativity (Badger & White, 2000, p. 157).

In short, each instructional approach to L2 writing has its strengths and weaknesses. However, it is suggested that the three approaches should be complementary (Badger & White, 2000; Kim & Kim,

2005) because one approach may not suit all educational levels and settings. Badger and White (2000) proposed an eclectic approach as a combination of product-, process-, and genre-oriented pedagogies which they called the process-genre approach. Their proposed framework for teaching writing consists of six major stages, including providing the situation, identifying the purpose, considering the genre, planning, constructing the text, and publishing it (Badger and White, 2000). The six stages require the involvement of teachers, students, and texts, in that order. The writing practice process is a cyclical process that encompasses contextual information, writing purposes, language knowledge, and writing abilities. Essentially, the primary objective of this writing style is to compel the writer to produce targeted content that aligns with a particular environment. During this process, the teacher imparts the learners with the essential contextual knowledge and language proficiency needed to comprehend the purpose of writing and excel in writing abilities, ultimately enabling them to create written works. The main features of their approach include the necessity of linguistic knowledge, awareness of the writing context, and the development of language skills, aimed at unlocking learners’ potential and providing them with the necessary input. Similarly, Wette (2014) argued that product-, process-, and genre distinctions may be muddled in practice and should not be

separated. Additionally, numerous studies on L2 writing recommend that L2 writing instruction should combine textual/linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions (Matsuda, 2003) while Wette (2014) suggests avoiding the simplistic conceptualisation of writing instructions.

2.4. Previous studies on teachers' beliefs about approaches to teaching writing

The examination of the multifaceted nature of belief and the dynamic relationship between belief, practice, and context enables the identification of teachers' strengths and limitations, as well as their experiences, problems, and barriers to professional development. However, recent empirical research examining teachers' beliefs about instructional strategies for L2 writing is limited.

Teng (2016) conducted a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews to explore changes in the beliefs of two Chinese EFL teachers regarding an instructional approach to students' writing learning after they have completed a teacher education project for teaching writing at a Chinese university. The findings demonstrated that teachers were more open to changing their beliefs about the appropriate teaching approaches and were eager to apply what they learned in the project to improve their writing classes for students as the professional development project helped them better comprehend writing approaches and

instructed them on how to implement these approaches in practice.

Tagle et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative case study to investigate the beliefs of thirty-seven pre-service EFL instructors from two Chilean universities regarding the teaching of writing, as well as the origins of those beliefs. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The findings suggested that the participants hold a variety of beliefs regarding the teaching of writing, including the use of grammar and vocabulary, the imitation of text types, and the incorporation of successive stages at the time of production. In addition, past experiences as EFL students and university training courses were the most influential factors in shaping the beliefs of EFL instructors.

Previous research in Vietnam has focused primarily on teachers' beliefs about writing instruction at the non-tertiary levels (Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023; Pham & Truong, 2021; Tuyen et al., 2016). Nguyen (2021) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate the beliefs of twenty instructors from five upper-secondary schools in Vietnam regarding aspects of EFL writing instructions. Through surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews, information was gathered. The findings indicated that although teachers believed in the significance of writing instructions, factors such as insufficient class time, large class sizes, and test-oriented curricula

significantly influenced their beliefs and teaching practices.

Nguyen et al. (2023) implemented a qualitative study through the use of semi-structured interviews to investigate the attitudes held by primary teachers in Vietnam regarding the instruction of writing. The participants consisted of 12 in-service teachers from five elementary schools located in a major city in Vietnam. The findings revealed that all the participating teachers unanimously believed in the paramount importance of writing for primary school learners and considered teaching writing to be one of the fundamental responsibilities of primary school instructors. The teachers identified the students' limited life experiences and lack of creativity as the primary obstacles in teaching writing. However, they encountered many practical limitations in assisting students in overcoming these obstacles. Although the teachers expressed their support for strategies that promote creativity and emotional expression in students' writing, they acknowledged relying on model texts in their instruction.

Pham and Truong (2021) utilised elements of a survey research design to investigate EFL high school teachers' beliefs about writing instructions, their actual practices in the classroom, and the interactions between their beliefs and practices. A total of seventy-six EFL teachers from eight high schools in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam were selected for the survey. The findings revealed that the

majority of participants held diverse perspectives or approaches toward the teaching of writing skills. These included form-based, cognitive process-based, functional social-based, and interactive social-based views. The authors concluded that the form-based approach remained the most prevalent belief among the participants. In reality, the majority of high school instructors have adopted the product method, which emphasises the importance of the form and structure of the text.

Tuyen et al. (2016) investigated the effectiveness of the process-genre approach in teaching writing to EFL high school students in Vietnam. By adopting a quasi-experimental design, the researchers examined the impacts of this approach on the writing proficiency of twenty-five tenth-grade students, specifically focusing on the aspects of 'content', 'organisation', 'vocabulary', and 'grammar'. The control group of students was instructed according to the Ministry of Education and Training's guidelines, using a 10th-grade English textbook. In contrast, the experimental group of students was taught utilising the curriculum based on the process-genre approach. During the pretest and posttest, students were required to compose a paragraph of 150-200 words on the subject of 'What is your favourite film?' within a time limit of 45 minutes. The findings suggest that the process-genre approach has a substantial positive impact on students' overall writing abilities. Students that were instructed using the process-

genre approach demonstrated superior performance in terms of ‘content’, ‘vocabulary’, and ‘grammar’ compared to the group taught using the English textbook. However, there was no statistically significant distinction observed between the two groups in terms of ‘organisation’.

With all the mentioned research into teachers’ beliefs about writing instructions at the secondary and upper-secondary levels, it can be argued that teachers’ beliefs about approaches to teaching writing at the tertiary level and the factors that influence the formation of these beliefs have not been sufficiently investigated in Vietnamese contexts. Therefore, the present study aims to elucidate Vietnamese EFL tertiary teachers’ beliefs about approaches to teaching writing and the factors influencing the formation of these beliefs. The theoretical frameworks of the three major approaches to teaching writing were used to analyse the teachers’ self-reported practice and identify their utilised and preferred approaches. In addition, the application of Borg’s (2003) framework helped explore the factors that shaped teachers’ beliefs about the preferred approach. By providing an in-depth examination of EFL writing teachers’ beliefs in tertiary contexts, it is anticipated that researchers, teacher educators, and EFL writing teachers will gain a deeper understanding of the shaping and reframing of teachers’ beliefs and the factors that contribute to the process. Teachers may also construct informed theories for teaching university students to

write in English as a foreign language.

3. Methodology

To address the research questions, qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) was used for two main reasons. First, qualitative research with its in-depth nature is suitable for investigating and analysing teacher’s beliefs about approaches to teaching writing. Second, this method also allows for thorough, multifaceted, and highly contextualised examinations of the factors influencing the formation of teachers’ beliefs.

3.1. Context and participants

The research site was a public university in Hanoi. It is one of the top institutions in Vietnam for teaching both foreign languages and other disciplines. English is the primary language of instruction for a variety of courses including Tourism, Business administration, and International studies.

A total of six Vietnamese EFL writing teachers in an English language division were invited to participate in the interviews. Three of them (Table 1) including Annie, Mia, and Henry (pseudonyms) accepted the invitation and participated in this study. Annie and Mia primarily taught non-English major students (A2-B1 level). Henry’s students were English major students (B2 level). The three teachers had to instruct students how to write several genres, such as argumentative, narrative, and opinion essays, as part of their departments’ curricula.

Table 1: Teacher participants

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Experience of teaching writing	Educational qualification
1	Annie	Female	24	3 years	MA
2	Henry	Male	25	3 years	MA
3	Mia	Female	24	3 years	MA

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Three semi-structured interviews (a total of 100 minutes in length) were conducted with each teacher participant at the university. The aim was to explore which approach they utilised and the one they preferred, and the factors that shaped their beliefs of the preferred approach. To identify these factors, Borg’s (2003) framework including professional coursework, classroom practice, and contextual factors was modified to accommodate the study’s objectives and the context of EFL in Vietnam and allow for a clearer demonstration of the factors influencing instructors’ beliefs. In particular, the factor ‘professional coursework’ was renamed as ‘professional development’, and the factor ‘classroom practice’ was combined with the contextual variables. Therefore, the final two factors are ‘professional development’ and ‘contextual factors’.

The lead researcher transcribed all data while both researchers carried out the data analysis and repeated peer reviews of the emergent themes. Thematic analysis was employed in this study since it involves the

identification and reporting of patterns in a data set, which are subsequently interpreted for their intrinsic meaning (Flick, 2023). The analysis followed the six steps which include getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Flick, 2023). A set of themes was subsequently established based on the concepts of instructional approaches to L2 writing offered in the prior literature (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003) and the adapted framework of Borg (2003). The two phases of the analysis, namely single-case and cross-case (Flick, 2023) were carried out to determine the similarities and differences among the three instructors. Strict ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research.

4. Findings

This section provides answers to the three research questions. While single-case analysis helps identify the preferred approaches of each teacher, the results of cross-case analysis demonstrate which approach they chose to utilise and the factors that shaped their preferred approach.

4.1. Teachers' utilised approaches to teaching writing

The self-reported practices of the three teachers demonstrated that, despite possible differences in the precise phases of each teacher's writing class, the product- and process-oriented approaches were integrated rather than used separately in their instruction. Henry stated that he started the lesson by letting students "read a sample essay for them to see how it is done by a professional writer" (IH12), and then asked them to notice the structure and the logical flow and complete controlled exercises. Yet he placed a strong emphasis on the various stages of the writing process as he reported that he let his students practice outlining and producing the first draft, and then he had certain activities for self-assessment and peer assessment so that students could revise their pieces of writing. Meanwhile, though Mia and Annie typically focused on introducing controlled activities and samples of writing to non-English-major students, they preferred asking students to generate ideas and create an outline. Mia described that after showing students a model essay, she would ask them to "analyse specific parts including the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion" (IM14). Students would then work with their peers in pairs or small groups to brainstorm ideas and make an outline for their writing. Therefore, it can be argued that components from the product- and process-oriented approach were included at various points throughout the lesson.

The three teachers had varied focuses when conceptualising their teaching practices despite the common amalgamation of approaches to instruction. Henry emphasised letting students "know what they should do in different steps of completing that writing" (IH1/16) and specifically valued various writing stages. Annie and Mia, on the other hand, insisted that writing instruction should emphasise the ultimate product as well as the structure and purpose of writing. While Mia admitted that "it is not really important if the students follow that process or not" (IM1/18), she incorporated some aspects of the process-oriented approach into her instruction. She continued to provide students with a model essay, "break it down into smaller parts, the introduction, the body, and the conclusion, and teach students how to write each part" (IM1/14). She also taught learners the vocabulary and grammatical patterns for each part.

4.2. Teachers' preferred approach to teaching writing and beliefs about their preferred approach

4.2.1. Annie – A product-oriented teacher with a strong emphasis on corrective feedback

As Annie emphasised the significance of the final product that students could make, the preference for the product approach was clearly stated. She conveyed that how she used sample texts as input to give learners a "big picture of the final product" (IA1/22) reflected this approach.

She also mentioned that she loved developing lesson activities and phases where she could provide feedback to her students. She felt that learners required “someone to correct their work” (IA1/24), particularly when it came to the proper use of language elements like grammatical and lexical features.

Annie believed that as a writing instructor, she should act as both an instructor and an assistant. She mentioned that she should take on the role of an instructor and inform the students of the framework they ought to use when writing effective essays. She also needed to serve as a writing assistant because students could have numerous inquiries during the writing process. In addition, she regularly motivated her students to “write something on Facebook in English” (IA1/24), thus she helped them out by asking them to send her their initial drafts so she could edit them before posting.

4.2.2. Mia - A product-oriented teacher with a sense of adaptability

Like Annie, Mia favoured the writing class in which she could utilise the product approach. Her confidence in the use of model texts for instructing students how to “write in that specific way” (IM1/22) to achieve the quality of the writing sample served as an indication of the nature of this approach. She also employed controlled activities in the textbook as a means to get pupils to concentrate on accuracy. However, Mia seems to prefer practical

application and modification of the lessons based on the students’ needs rather than adhering strictly to prescribed materials. She stated, “There are some book sections that I skipped; I do not ask them to do all the book activities. I’ll put more of my attention on the things I think are crucial, and I’ll also give them more time to practise” (IM1/20). Mia believes that “teaching is not just like you prepare everything, you plan everything, and then you just go to the class and give them all out it is more about trials and errors” (IM1/24).

Mia thought that a teacher’s primary responsibility should be to impart knowledge. According to her, a writing instructor should educate students on how to create multiple types of writing, arm them with linguistic knowledge, and offer advice on how to improve their writing. She also emphasised the necessity of thoroughly outlining important flaws for students, particularly when it comes to coherence and cohesion.

4.2.3. Henry – A firm believer in the process approach

Henry, in contrast to the other two teachers, made it clear that he was a process-oriented teacher, demonstrating his apparent preference for that method. He emphasised “what to write in writing is important, the ‘what’ should be the target that the students compare their unfinished works from time to time too but it shouldn’t be the focus of different lessons” (IH1/20).

Instead, he wanted to support students in becoming independent and creative writers, which demonstrated his belief that “people need to go through the same process of writing, which is a labor-intensive, demanding but rewarding process” (IH1/20). Henry emphasised the importance of student discussion. This was demonstrated by his statement that the kind of class he preferred was one where students enjoyed debating and challenging one another’s viewpoints. He admitted that his writing class included both student self-evaluation and peer evaluation as well. He said he frequently handed students a feedback sheet with various criteria so they could comment on their peers’ writing. Since students had to edit their first draft in response to feedback from teachers and peers to produce a second draft, Henry also paid close attention to the use of multiple drafts in his instruction.

Henry saw himself to be a mentor in terms of the role of teachers. He mentioned his desire to assist learners in overcoming challenges and stressful phases along the way of their writing so that they would know what to do in the future. Henry also felt it was his duty to provide students with guidance for them to solve their issues and complete written assignments.

4.3. Factors influencing the formation of teachers’ beliefs about their preferred approach(es) to teaching writing

This section provides the results of the two selected factors, including professional development and contextual factors, which

have been adapted from Borg’s (2003) framework of teacher cognition.

4.3.1. Lack of professional development

Regarding professional development, the three teachers acknowledged that they had never taken any official courses on approaches to teaching writing or even on how to teach writing in general. Henry and Annie said they did not know if a course like that had ever been organised at their university while Mia added that “the busy schedule of teaching would not allow teachers to participate in that kind of course even if it is available” (IM42). The teachers acknowledged acquiring their knowledge of teaching methodologies by themselves, either through books, the Internet, or from other colleagues. For instance, Henry stated that he frequently learned about teaching writing from books and videos (IH1/40). Mia and Annie, on the other hand, primarily picked up knowledge from meetings with other co-workers when they discussed ways to enhance the practice of teaching writing.

Despite this, all three participants agreed on the value of professional development for teaching writing. They could address issues that might arise when putting the approaches to teaching writing into practice by taking training courses on these topics. Teachers would have the opportunities, in Annie’s words, “to know about a new approach to teaching, how to improve the quality of teaching writing and learn from colleagues” (IA1/18) through

training courses. She anticipated that “those courses can provide teachers with creative, applicable teaching method, material, and lesson plan source” (IA1/18). It was clear from this that professional development was crucial for young teachers like her who did not have a complete understanding of all the techniques of teaching writing, so restricting their opportunities to improve their teaching quality. Henry stated his desire to take part in training programmes that would help him get insight into how to make writing assignments for students less intimidating and demanding. Henry stated, “I really want to learn about how can I make the while-writing processes, like drafting, outlining, and the later processes, like revising and editing, less overwhelming or less challenging for students” (IH1/ 36).

4.3.2. Contextual factors

Large-sized classrooms

Due to the large size of the classroom, the participating teachers said they faced difficulties in writing instruction, particularly when it came to marking and providing feedback on students’ writing. Typically, the number of students in their writing classes ranged from 25 to 30, but for them, 15 was the ideal number. Annie lamented that it was difficult to mark all of the students’ work in a week since she placed such a strong emphasis on providing feedback. She complained:

“It is very difficult for us to, you know,

mark all the students writing in about one week. For example, we have like 30 students in one class, but we have to teach so many classes within a week. We have to teach like about five classes, so we have more than 100 papers to mark in one week. I think it’s impossible for us to collect all the students’ writings, so we can only give feedback on some of the representative sample writings” (IA1/40).

In the instance of Mia, she also wished to explain any mistakes made by students and to correct all of their written work. She acknowledged that this might be time-consuming and stressful, though, because

“There are many students in one class and for me to correct all the writings that could be a burden and you know, like to correct and also to show them to explain the mistake to them like some kind of mistake I need to explain, so, that would be very time-consuming” (IM1/42), she said.

Henry, a process-oriented teacher, also spoke to the negative effects of big classrooms because he had to “guide and take care of” (IM1/42) a lot of students as they went through various stages of the writing process, which meant plenty of work for the teacher.

Students’ lack of motivation

Three participating teachers concurred that their students lacked motivation to learn L2 writing. Most students considered writing to be an obligatory subject, and passing exams was their only source of

incentive. The degree of participation among the students was significantly affected by this. According to Henry, fewer students attended writing classes than classes on other skills. He explained:

“Let’s say in one class that I taught writing in my university most recently, there were about 15 students who often participate in my writing class. And I think around maybe seven or eight of them were excited and quite motivated to learn more about writing because, as they explained, writing is quite important in their job” (IH1/44).

Although students desired to enhance their writing abilities, according to Mia, they did not put much effort into doing so. Because writing is challenging for learners, Mia claims that even when they “really want to improve the writing skill, they are afraid to do that” (IM1/46). In her writing class, the students’ lack of commitment to completing their assignments or exercises had an impact on their performance. Then, to ensure that students practised writing skills outside of the classroom, Annie had to “come up with something that makes students want to finish their writing at home” (IA1/46). To encourage their students to write in English, the three teachers were forced to modify their usual approach to writing instruction. Using topics or issues to students’ interests, encouraging them to write freely and creatively about things they enjoy, and allowing them to voice any concerns they may have about their writing are a few examples.

5. Discussion

5.1. *Utilised approaches to teaching writing*

Regarding the approaches to teaching writing reported in the study, teachers indicated using an eclectic approach that integrates both product- and process-oriented methods, at various stages of the writing process. They tended to provide model texts to demonstrate how the target language is used and guide students through the writing process. While Henry emphasised the steps of writing, Mia and Annie placed greater value on the final writing products. The requirement for teachers to be adaptable to situational needs and innovative in hybridising instructional approaches by embracing the fundamental tenets of these approaches that teachers had in their pedagogic repertoire might be one explanation for this phenomenon.

Additionally, the incorporated approaches in self-reported practice may also suggest that the three teachers perceived these components as being crucial to the needs and competence levels of their students. These conceptual orientations are essential in assisting teachers in determining the writing-related elements that require their attention (Matsuda, 2003). The focus of writing instruction (on the use of language or idea development) and writing processes (such as prewriting, multiple drafts, peer evaluation, and instructors’ feedback) are

topics that teachers might anticipate addressing in the context of teaching EFL. As a result, when implementing instructional approaches, teachers may link their knowledge and skills to these issues to achieve appropriateness for “specific curriculum contexts, student groups, and individual teaching style or preferences” (Cumming, 2002, p. 87).

However, the teachers did not report the use of a process-genre approach combination. Several studies have found that the process-genre approach is an effective strategy for enhancing the writing skills of students (Truong, 2022; Tuyen et al., 2016). They indicated that implementing the process-genre technique for teaching EFL writing has enriched the instructional curriculum in L2 writing classrooms, leading to improved student writing performance. The process-genre approach incorporates and inherits the benefits of conventional teaching approaches. The process-genre approach is also beneficial for students as it can improve their overall writing performance, empower their self-efficacy of writing ideation, conventions, and self-regulation, raise their awareness, and encourage behaviours of writing autonomy (Truong, 2022). Tuyen et al. (2016) provided a detailed suggestion for the use of the process-genre approach for teaching writing. They divided the application of the process-genre approach into three distinct stages: (1) pre-stage/ planning, which involves brainstorming ideas or vocabulary,

analysing sample writing texts, organising ideas (2) while-stage/drafting, which provides learners with controlled and free writing task so that they can express their ideas and knowledge; and (3) post-stage, which focuses on providing feedbacks for students, revising and editing. This model for implementation has been proven useful in significantly improving students’ writing abilities in terms of content and language use (Tuyen et al., 2016). With these suggestions for practical and effective implementation, the process-genre approach may offer the benefits of process teaching with genre-based writing instruction as it incorporates genre knowledge to enhance the writing process, aiming to achieve flexible teaching that motivates students and effectively prepares them for various social communication situations.

5.2. Teachers’ preferred approach to teaching writing and beliefs about their preferred approach

In contrast to the emphasis on the pluralistic approach that is evident in self-reported practice, the findings of our study also revealed the single-approach preference expressed by the three EFL writing teachers since each teacher made clear their preference for either a product- or process-oriented approach. Their fervent beliefs regarding the significance of each approach in fostering students’ writing abilities may help to explain such findings. It is also implied that the teachers neglected to emphasise the significance of

introducing learners to the genre's social purpose and instead focused primarily on the targeted genre's organisational patterns and major linguistic features. This phenomenon was consistent with the findings of the study by Shi et al. (2019), which showed that teachers only paid partial attention to the social intent of the targeted genre, somewhat impeding the successful application of the pedagogy. In the Vietnamese context, Nguyen (2022) also noted that teachers' beliefs and practices still frequently focused solely on the linguistic aspects of writing, seeing writing primarily as a textual output "without giving explicit attention to the social-cultural rules of using language appropriately in context" (Nguyen, 2022, p. 79). Finally, the neglect of the genre-based approach might derive from two main reasons. First, the genre-based approach requires a deep understanding of different writing genres, including their structure and language features, which might be challenging for both teachers and students who are not native English speakers. This is in line with the study of Nguyen (2021) as she noted that an effective implementation of the genre-based approach might demand extensive training and resources to help teachers design lesson plans and class activities around this approach, which might not be readily available in Vietnamese educational settings. Second, since the genre-based approach relies on active participation and collaboration between teachers and

students to analyse and produce texts, the application of this approach could be hindered by large class sizes or traditional teaching approaches that do not encourage such interaction and dynamism.

In addition, the participating instructors expressed a variety of beliefs about the preferred approach regarding the nature, traits, process, and teacher's role, echoing the earlier literature (Nguyen, 2021; Pham & Truong, 2021). For example, teachers who favoured the product-oriented approach believed in the introduction of a model text and its positive influences on the development of students' grammatical and lexical use. As a result, they perceived themselves as knowledge providers who mainly helped students by providing corrective feedback on their mistakes.

5.3. Factors influencing the formation of teachers' beliefs about their preferred approach(es) to teaching writing

In terms of the influencing factors, professional development and contextual factors have an impact on teachers' beliefs. First of all, all three instructors acknowledged a lack of professional development and emphasised the significance of it for deepening their comprehension of various L2 writing instruction approaches. This is consistent with what Shi et al. (2019) and Teng (2016) found. Teachers' ideas and teaching practices can be positively impacted by properly designed professional development programs that offer a clear

example of how to integrate these approaches into writing classes (Shi et al., 2019). Teachers' beliefs were also significantly influenced by several contextual factors, such as the size of the classes and lack of motivation among the students. This is in line with the results of other studies carried out in Vietnam, such as those by Nguyen (2021) and Pham and Truong (2021), which similarly reported the interaction between teachers' beliefs and influencing factors such as class size, teaching materials, test demands. These context-specific factors made teachers recognise the downsides of their implementation of a single-theory instructional approach to L2 writing.

6. Implications and Conclusion

This qualitative study examined the beliefs of three EFL writing instructors in Vietnamese tertiary EFL classrooms regarding approaches to teaching writing and the contributing factors influencing the formation of their beliefs. The results show that their self-reported practices are relatively similar since they all combined the principles of product-, process-, and genre-oriented approaches. Nonetheless, they tend to favour a single-theory approach, based on a variety of beliefs that influence the implementation of the eclectic approach's focal point. Moreover, a dearth of professional development and contextual constraints (i.e., large class sizes and students' lack of motivation) contributed to the formation of teachers' beliefs.

Theoretical and pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings. First, the study theoretically contributes to the emerging research focus of L2 writing teachers in L2 education and the existing literature on approaches to writing by portraying teachers' beliefs regarding these approaches and the factors influencing those beliefs at the tertiary level in Vietnam. The study is another attempt to apply the paradigm developed by Borg (2003) in the Vietnamese context. The framework aided in recognising teachers' shared dissatisfaction with the lack of professional development and their expressed desire to participate in training programs focusing on approaches to teaching writing, thus enhancing their instructional practices.

In terms of pedagogical implication, it is suggested that L2 writing teachers should integrate all three approaches at various stages in their teaching and provide relevant writing projects with thoughtfully crafted scaffolding activities. For example, a genre-based approach could be introduced at the beginning of the lesson so that students can understand the purpose of a writing piece, then the process-oriented approach might be applied so that students get involved in each stage of writing, and the use of a model text of the product-based approach would help students further investigate different grammatical and lexical aspects. In addition, as the finding reveals disparities between teachers' utilised and preferred approaches, it is

crucial to consider teachers' voices in designing training courses. Most Vietnamese EFL teachers are motivated to learn to teach writing but they need enthusiastic and supportive mentors to model effective teaching practices, share their teaching experiences, and provide constructive feedback (Nguyen & Hudson, 2010). Specifically, promoting teacher training on the genre-based approach is recommended, as such training offers teachers "opportunities in (re)shaping in-service teachers' beliefs (Alvear, 2023, p. 4). These opportunities empower teachers to improve their awareness of approaches to teaching writing, potentially leading to adjustment in their beliefs and instructional practices. Particularly, they would gain a better understanding of the genre-based approach and be better equipped to integrate fundamental principles into their teaching practices.

However, there are certain limitations to this study. The present research relied on data from three tertiary lecturers at one university in Vietnam. To have a deeper understanding of the similarities and variations of teachers' beliefs in diverse settings, future research might involve additional teachers from various universities. The present study only found two contextual factors including class size and students' motivation, it is therefore recommended that more contextual variables (such as teachers' prior experience as EFL learners, and collegial influence be taken into account.

Additionally, since interviews were the sole means of data collection for this qualitative study, the relationship between teacher beliefs and practices was not fully explored. Future research will therefore triangulate data utilising multiple data sources, such as observation, teacher journals, student work and assessments, and lesson plans and instructional materials, to further investigate the field.

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